The Black Cat

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A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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No. 19. APRIL, 1897. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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The Peacock and the Copper Moon.

BY FRANCES AYMAR MATHEWS.

THE little frontier river Balsk flows yellow and sluggish in the short summer; in the long and bitter winter it is stopped short in its tawny curdle of tiny waves, and stilled into a shimmer of icy, motionless topaz. It starts in the far-off hills; it creeps through the distant valleys; it leaps laughing at the side of small villages; it yawns widely hither, and anon it narrows to a few yards, sidling in the sullen arms of some vast and pitiful morass like this one, on the edge of which lies the hamlet of Bolski. A handful of huts, a church with its pear-shaped, gilded dome, a market-place, a few shops of a mean quality, these are all the river passes here. Beyond the marsh, remote from the settlement, where the topaz stream glimmers between wastes of snow illimitable, where the call of the wolf is not infrequent, where the twilight comes earlier than anywhere else, filtering through a thicket of leafless boughs, where loneliness and desolation seem written over everything, there stands an isolated hut. The doors are barred, the windows tightly closed, so if there be light or life within, it may not shine forth. A rude bench is upturned at the threshold, a bucket with rust rims lies beside it. The paths about it are

trackless; in the thicket is heard a whirr and clatter, the sharp note of a peacock, who comes out into the open yard to shriek and run up and down, doubtless with hunger. The sky, intensely blue, riddled with stars, grows gradually brilliant on the edge of the horizon of the west, and the copper moon now disks the heavens.

The peacock ceases its scream, seeing the splendor of its feathers in the new and gaudy light. Through a chink in the heavy door glints a ray; distantly there sounds the dull thud of horse's hoofs pounding the new snow's softness; the gallop echoes from the marshland, that wilderness of drifted whiteness stretching for leagues to the north, and not from the direction of the village.

In a moment the heavy door of the hut swung open, and an aged peasant, by name Isaac, stole cautiously out. With his hand to his ear, he lay flat on the ground, to listen the better, then arose, and nodding to his wife, Katinka, who stood holding the lamp in the entrance, he muttered, "She comes."

A flutter of snow, bounding horse-high, a streak of shadow across the reddish splurge of the copper moonlight on the marsh, a shower of twigs breaking in the thicket, a wilfuller shriek from the peacock darting to meet the comer, and into the hut-yard rode he who was known as the young grandson of Isaac and Katinka, Ivor Maxhoff, the spendthrift, the beautiful, the undutiful, the mysterious, the traveled.

He laughed as he swung from his steed, which Isaac took at once to the stable, he patted Katinka's cheek, he stroked the peacock, and entering the hut and drawing Katinka after him, he closed the door tightly; thus the copper moon was left to make what merriment it could out of the world by itself, for within this hut it could not penetrate either at window, door, or crevice.

Soon all was still; not a sound, not a breath, save the munching of Ivor Maxhoff's horse at his oats and corn, until toward the dawn the wooden blind of one of the windows was pushed open by a hand so fair and beautiful as to belong unmistakably to a woman; on one of its fingers shone an opal, and on the opal shone the last mocking rays of the copper moon. To meet the first chill light of the morning, the woman leaned far out, regardless

of the keen air blowing on her bare white neck, from which slipped the folds of a pink velvet, fur-trimmed peignoir. Her long, fine hair hung in curling masses over her brow and about her small ears, in such profusion of splendid color, so vivid of gold, as to savor unquestionably of art; but the face it shadowed was unmarred by any such aids.

It was a face of exquisite and alluring loveliness, the face of a woman who knew her own superlative power to charm, and who possibly had been reckless in the use of it; it was a face whose capacity to love spoke alike in the slow and glamorous light of the blue eyes and the red fulness of the large and perfect mouth. As she bent, listening surely for something or some one, her other hand clasped the opal-ringed one, and on it glistened diamonds by the dozens. Straining those hands together in an agony of prayer and hope, "O God," murmured she brokenly, "bring to me as quickly as the lightning him whom my soul and body and heart loveth; bring to me here Sasha Serdobin, and may it please thee that I may be permitted to save him from the hand of his enemies who hunt him now, the hand of the spoiler, the cruel, the ravenous, the despot of my country, Russia."

Anon she drew in, leaving the shutter open, and crossing herself before the sacred icon on the wall, she paced the room until all the light that ever came to Bolski in winter had arrived.

When Katinka entered, bringing food, she threw it upon the porcelain under the stove, enraged that any one should think that she would eat at such a crisis. The peacock gladly pecked it up for his breakfast, while Isaac filled the stove with wood. The beautiful woman still paced up and down the room. Turning sharply, she asked of Isaac: —

"Repeat to me what you did with the clothes."

"Excellency, I did burrow me a tunnel ten feet long in the snow on the marsh twenty rods away; there I carried the clothes, the shoes, the cap, the man's whip, and buried them safe."

"And your tracks?"

"Excellency, I bade Katinka let loose your Excellency's horse the rope's length, and by urging and wheedling with whip and corn bag I lured it such a frisking pace as it kicked the snow a thousand paths all about from here to the marsh.

"And the studio?"

"Is in perfect order, Excellency."

"The fresh clay?"

"In abundance, moist to your Excellency's hand, full one hundred pounds."

"The fires, the lamps?"

"All burning as for a festival."

"That is all."

She motioned the old man away and knelt by the window, from which neither ear nor eye had wandered while she spoke; she beheld across the marsh mists smoking in the sun, the chimneys of the village, the dome of the church; she heard the buzz and stir of newly awakened labor and desire; she thought she detected a hum of hurrying hoofs, a shout of approaching human voices, a clank of swords; the drops stood out on her brow; she crouched; she rose to laugh and clap her hands in glee! It had been but the weekly courier with his parcels, the voices of children spurred to school by fathers and mothers, and not the merciless soldiers of the imperial regiments, always on the alert on the frontiers, and never more so than when, as just now, they sought the great reward promised to him who should capture, alive or dead, the anarchist leader, Sasha Serdobin, known to be implicated here in Bolski with the reputed grandson of Isaac and Katinka, the spendthrift, Ivor Maxhoff, the arch-enemy to the great and good Tzar.

Well, the beautiful woman was glad for a moment, then again she fell prey to misery. Where tarried he? God grant that he and his pursuers come not into the hut-yard together!

She left the room, and, crossing the kitchen, opened the house door, and stepped out into the freezing air, while the peacock walked statelily in her wake. Suddenly it gave a loud scream, prolonging its cry and spreading its handsome tail. The woman started forward, her arms extended toward the tall shadow that came before her,— and in another moment Kara Kalefsky was folded in the arms of Sasha Serdobin.

"My dove of heaven!" whispered the young man. "Thou here! and I thought thee safe in Steltin. Wherefore is it?"

"Listen," she murmured, even in her ecstasy of delight being calm and mindful, as is the fashion of such natures. "I came

last night. I rode from Tirover, ten leagues, like the wind, knowing that thou wert due here to-day. The spies are on thy track, and," — laughing, — "on the track of the boy, Ivor Maxhoff! But though they will be here ere the day ends they will not find either of those they seek, albeit they will look at them both."

"But, Kara, let us away, once in their grasp, thy life and mine are ended."

"Nay, not so, Sasha, my beloved; the agents of the Tzar, under the leadership of Merreshoff himself, are not two hours' ride from us. Our safety consists in stopping precisely where we are.

"There, not a word, I beg of thee! Get thee in yonder with Isaac, and give him thy blouse, thy coat, thy vest, thy cravat, and cap; he will bury them well beside the garments of the Nihilist boy, Ivor Maxhoff." Again Kara laughed. "He will envelop thee in one of Katinka's best woven linen sheets, and will lead thee to me — Kara Kalefsky, the celebrated sculptress, the eccentric, the winsome, the volatile, the whimsical — in my studio. Away with you, and make haste."

While Sasha Serdobin, mystified, but full of abiding confidence in this woman, preceded the aged peasant into the inner room, Katinka went above to assist her mistress. As she placed the last jeweled pin in the folds of the countess' Greek-like gown, Kara turned to her with cheeks and eyes that burned.

"Clasp these bracelets on my arms, Katinka, so; fasten this fillet around my hair, aye, unbraid it all and let the full sweep of the golden curls I bought in Paris for a fabulous sum fall to my knees. Well!" with a laugh, "it hides perfectly the short, dark curls of your supposed grandson, Ivor, does it not?"

"O Excellency!" muttered the peasant, surveying the exultant figure before her, "St. Michael grant that the soldiers catch you not, you and his Excellency. For you, for the cause of liberty and right, would we, Isaac and I, risk and give our blood, because we remember —" the old face, glorified by its past into a smoothness as of youth, reddened with enthusiasm — "we remember," she repeated, "the iron ice of the mines of Siberia, the twenty years in its grasp, and the little child of our child, that we left there frozen beside its frozen mother. 'Tis for all of that we struggle now, to some way avenge the barbarities practised upon

us and ours. Ah! the wolves, the hyenas, the devils," kneeling before the sacred icon, "to cheat them of their prey."

The last jewel was in its place, the last film of lace folded over the bosom; Kara Kalefsky left the upper chamber and went down into her studio. It was under ground; it was built as a refuge and meeting place for enemies of the governmental system of Russia; was used as such three nights ago; had always been kept in readiness for use as a workroom in case of necessity by Kara Kalefsky, who was, unknown to any save her secret associates, an ardent revolutionary sympathizer, the abettor and aid of her lover, Sasha Serdobin. He, it was discovered only a month ago, had headed a secret plot for the assassination of the newly crowned Tzar Nicholas. Upon his person, dead or alive, the price of ten thousand roubles had been placed, and at this moment he was being hunted like a wild beast by General Merreshoff who, with a company of one hundred picked men in his suite, had just now — hear the royal bells ringing! — ridden into the little village of Bolski in pursuit of his prey. At the sound of the bells Isaac, who — his task accomplished — sat and smoked in the living room, nodded over at Katinka, who was molding oat cakes on a smooth stone. The old woman nodded back again. They looked a stolid pair, with no soul above the pipe and the cake; no heart higher than the stove's heat in winter, the sun's ray in summer, yet within their brains burned the frantic flame of those who believed themselves cheated of their divine right to liberty of conscience, mind, speech, and body — whipped into a show of submission to a power that they only awaited the chance to overthrow.

Placidly Isaac smoked on, and Katinka, his wife, now spread the cakes to bake in the ashes; neither of them even glanced around as into the hut-yard, with the blast of a bugle and jingle of swords, dashed the plumed and brilliant soldiery, General Merreshoff, gallant, handsome, young, at their head.

Katinka turned her cakes and Isaac filled his pipe. The knock of the saber handle on the door, the rude oath, the impatient kick, and then the general, dismounting and entering, gave the word to handcuff the two peasants, surround the hut and stable, and allow no one to quit the place alive.

"We are seeking a fellow called Ivor Maxhoff, and another named Sasha Serdobin," he said, addressing himself to Isaac, "they are tracked close to your hut. The boy is said to be your grandson. Where are they now?"

Isaac shook his head.

Katinka shook hers.

Their nerveless immobility did not surprise the general, accustomed to the hard-won impassivity of the Russian peasant, and thoroughly cognizant of the past history of these two.

"If you will not tell, we must hunt, and game is food for powder and shot; it will be wiser to answer me. Where are they?"

The heads of Isaac and Katinka had not finished wagging for a second time when the scream of the peacock was heard proceeding as if from the heart of the earth, followed by a burst of woman's laughter, so sweet, so luscious, so entrancing, as to cause every man's cap of them all to leave his head.

"Who is that?" inquired Merreshoff.

"Excellency, that is her Excellency, the Countess Kara Kalefsky," replied Katinka.

Young Paul Merreshoff's dark eyes flashed fire. Kara Kalefsky was the one woman whom he desired to meet, of whose genius, wit, brilliancy, beauty, and fascinations he had heard so much during the past season at St. Petersburgh.

"The Countess Kalefsky here!" he cried derisively. "Preposterous! She is renowned as a woman devoted solely to the pursuit of her art. A woman free even from the suspicion of coquetry, freer still from the intrigues of revolutionists. Katinka Torloff, tell me some more probable story!"

Again that sullen silence, now once more broken by the scream of the peacock and the woman's laugh.

"Where is she? — the woman whose laughter I hear?" he cried, shaking his sheathed sword in the faces of the aged pair.

Still silently, and with the dragging step of apparent reluctance, Isaac led the way out into the yard, where the merciful snow had covered up every trace of his path toward the marsh, and indeed of any recent footsteps. A few yards back of the hut the old peasant stopped and nodded toward a certain depression

in the level whiteness. The soldiers cleared away the snow that had fallen since Kara Kalefsky went down, disclosing a square stone with a wooden ring set in its center. They lifted it, and waves of mellow light flooded the expanse of glistening snow.

General Merreshoff stepped to the brink of the aperture as his men fell back respectfully. A rude ladder was placed there. He was wary, if a brave leader; he motioned Isaac to precede him in the descent, and followed with his soldiers and Katinka.

Once below, in a small, square anteroom, at one side of which hung heavy curtains, waving in the wind, Isaac hesitated.

"Go on!" muttered Merreshoff, his pistols in his hand; then, as Katinka pushed back the curtains, he stood transfixed.

The salon extended some sixty feet before him, — it was at least twenty under ground, — the floor was of marble inlaid in quaint figures, and strewn with rich skins of bears, tigers, lions. Four huge stoves, glowing with heat, stood two at either side. Bronze lamps, with globes of pink and yellow, swung at intervals from the ceiling, which was of an interlaced Moorish pattern, studded with crystals; the walls were hung with shawls from India, and here and there, half shrouded, half revealed, appeared statues, gleaming ghost-like in the mysterious light of the lanterns. A few pictures of gorgeous coloring stood about on easels, and like a streak of sunshine there spread from his feet to the farthest end of the room a narrow strip of warmest yellow silken carpet.

Yonder, on a broad-railed platform of wood, the whole width of the salon, towered a superb draped figure in the clay, the figure of a man in his youth, his prime, his beauty. On a little ladder, close to her work, stood Kara Kalefsky, the sculptress, at one side an enormous lump of moist clay, from which she now and then took a bit as she needed, in her hands the little modeling tools of boxwood and ivory; all about her the marvelous glory of her splendid hair, the sweep of her yellow velvet robe, the sheen of jewels; at the foot of the ladder the peacock strutted, uttering again its piercing scream as it caught sight of the intruders.

With a word of reproof to her pet, uttered in a voice musical as the tones of a lute, his mistress, apparently unconscious of the observers, proceeded with strong, supple fingers to mold and knead the plastic clay, dipping them now and then in the porce-

lain basin of water, caressing the impassive gray clay with a touch as soft and light as true love's own.

Meantime the officer of the Tzar reasserted himself over the mere man, and the general, motioning Isaac back, lifted his hat, pocketed his pistol and advanced, flushing, it must be recorded, at thus invading the privacy of a young and beautiful woman.

At the sound of his heels grating on the marble between the furs, the countess looked up in surprise, terror, astonishment.

"Pardon, Excellency," murmured the general, saluting her with the most profound respect. "I am Paul Merreshoff, general, at your service, and now here in the service of my country, seeking two wanton rebels and revolutionists, tracked to this peasant's hut,— by name, Ivor Maxhoff, the reputed grandson of these people, and Sasha Serdobin, a young nobleman whose good birth and courtly breeding should have taught him better loyalty than to plot against his country and his emperor. My excuses, Madame, I lay at your feet; sure am I that one as loyal as every member of your family has ever been will accept them, and aid me to the best of your ability."

Merreshoff laid his sword down at the feet of Kara, who immediately motioned him to restore it to his side.

"General," she said with dignity, "it seems to me harsh that the privacy of a woman pursuing her profession in quietness should thus be rudely broken in upon, but we will waive that. I can spare a few moments from my statue — it is of Glinka, and for the Alexandroff Theater in Moscow, to be finished in time for the anniversary performance of Life for the Tzar."

Merreshoff drew a step nearer the model and bowed deferentially, both in honor of Glinka and of the countess.

"Very gladly," continued Kara Kalefsky, "will I pause and tell you what I know."

"Then your Excellency does know something. If your Excellency only will tell me even your suspicions, I shall then be exonerated from the cruel duty of placing you under arrest, — a mere matter of form, it is true, but a form, Madame, I implore you to assist me in getting rid of."

"Assuredly will I. Isaac, Katinka, roll an easy chair for the general. What!" perceiving the irons on the two peasants, "it

is not possible. Well, General, I suppose suspicion fathers many an injustice. Draw the chair yourself, I beg — so.

"Six months since I hired this deserted hall and hut, and these two worthy people to wait upon me. Where had I heard of this marvelous underground salon? From a very dear friend who knew of it through the Chief of Police in Moscow. I am impulsive, eccentric, wilful, if you like; the idea struck me as charming. I came, bringing my clay, my tools, pictures, carpets, all the impedimenta we women think we cannot live without. I settled myself to my work," indicating the statue and leaning over a bit on her aerial seat to moisten her fingers and lay them on the lips and around the orifices of the ears of Glinka.

Merreshoff gazed speechless upon the sumptuous picture before him. He was dazzled, overcome by the purity and sweetness of the woman's voice, the beauty and grace of her bearing. But besides being an impressionable man, Merreshoff was an alert soldier, politician, and lawyer. He said, "Yes, precisely. Pardon me if I ask the name of the dear friend whose information as to this place came from the Moscow Chief of Police?" The tone was gentle but commanded a direct answer.

The countess hesitated an instant, while seemingly unconsciously her fingers again wandered to the basin of water, and she moistened once more the lips of the clay statue.

"The name is a woman's," she at last said; "Sonya Frioff, — she is a very dear friend of mine."

The general's eyes flashed fire. "So!" he exclaimed eagerly; then throwing back his head, he continued: "Since your Excellency has been here, have you seen the boy, Ivor Maxhoff?"

"Never," replied Kara, with a little smile, emphasizing, as she spoke, the dimple in the chin of the statue with one taper finger. "But I know," she went on, "that he arrived last night —"

Merreshoff sprang to his feet, while Isaac and Katinka exchanged a terrified half glance, and the soldiers stood more erectly.

"Listen," continued the countess, as she leaned against the ladder step above her, clasped her hands behind her head and spoke quietly. "He stopped not ten minutes; his horse stands now in the stable, the youth himself went in that direction" —

pointing toward the marsh — "on foot, alone. He must be, having now had twelve hours' start, quite far on his way to Steltin, if that were his destination. This worthy old man and woman know no more of him than you do. I beheld his arrival, though I saw not his face ever — also his swift departure."

Merreshoff gave his orders at once for the scouring of the marsh, and amid a clatter of tongues and hoofs the men set off.

"Excellency," exclaimed the general, now pacing up and down the room, "will you permit me to dismiss not only the rest of my men but your servants? I desire a few moments' private conversation."

Kara paused a moment, standing upon the ladder step. "General," she replied, "you are aware of the loyalty of my family, you see me at my work. You interrupt me at, I assure you, a critical moment; inspiration does not come at call. I pray you, leave me, else my model becomes parched, it cracks, dries, is ruined, — and I with it." She laid her beautiful jeweled hand, as she spoke, upon the head of Glinka. "I pray you to believe me when I say that my life, my heart, soul, mind, my past and future, are bound up in this statue and its successful issue. So, sir," turning to take up her tools, "I to my work and you to yours."

"Countess," cries the man, "I ask your pardon, but" — he waves his hand to the soldiers, and Isaac and Katinka, at which signal they hastily withdraw — "I must see you alone."

Kara caresses the hair, the brow of the insensate clay. Her lips move as if in inarticulate prayer. She takes the basin of water and pours it slowly over the mass of clay, watching it trickle down the shoulders, the arms, the heavy folds of the drapery.

Merreshoff watches her, charmed to be alone with her, and delighted to see, as he thinks, a clear path to the capture of one, at least, of those for whom he hunts. "Excellency," he cries, leaning, deprecating yet commanding, on his sword.

Kara turns toward him, but her touch does not quit the clay.

"You tell me that Sonya Frioff is a very dear friend of yours?"

"The dearest," she says, going on with her work.

"Excellency," drawing close to her, "then I suppose you know the story of her heart?"

It seems to the countess that her statue trembles beneath her hand, but that surely must have been caused by her own agitation.

"You are loyal; upon you I can rely. For the sake of your country you would not count the cost to your friendly feelings, could you assist in putting a traitor — well —" the general takes a short turn across the salon — "where he could no longer plot his devil's schemes against our most beloved sovereign?"

Kara leans her dimpled elbow on the clammy shoulder of the clay statue as she says: —

"General, I would count no cost too great to end the existence of one who was a traitor to his country."

"I knew it," cries the man, darting to her and speaking in low, hurried tones. "The path is clear; Countess Kara, Sonya Frioff, as you must know, or, if she has kept it from you, I tell it you now —" surely the statue does sway beneath the pressure of that beautiful arm — "is the loved one, the idol of Sasha Serdobin."

Countess Kara looks straight at General Merreshoff; her eyes burn like sapphires in sunshine, her red lips part, the laces on her bosom throb, the yellow masses of her long hair shimmer, as they lie the length of her yellow velvet gown, but she moves not.

"It but remains for you to return with me at once to Moscow, visit Sonya Frioff, learn from her the plans and whereabouts of Sasha Serdobin, communicate these to me — the rest is simple."

Kara Kalefsky remains motionless.

"What would the rest be?" she finally murmurs.

"Imprisonment for life or execution, probably the former; at the beginning of his reign his imperial majesty is pleased to exercise clemency."

"Imprisonment for life in a dungeon," echoes the woman. "Do you think that would be sufficient punishment for a man who was a traitor even to a woman, setting aside a country or its government?" She speaks calmly, slowly. She has removed her arm from the statue, but sits close to it, on the top step of the ladder, her head gleaming radiantly against the dull clay.

Merreshoff looks at her and is dazzled by her exquisite beauty, so full of fire and yet so calm. "No, if the woman were thee, a thousand times no! But no man could be false to thee, Kara Kalefsky. I have heard of thee and laughed. I have seen thee

and am at thy feet." He seizes the down-hanging fringe of her sash and presses it to his lips.

The woman above him rises slowly, shaking her head at him as one might at an indulged child. "Not now," she says gently. "To-day, remember you are a soldier seeking to do your duty, while I —" she comes down the ladder and stands, her hands folded behind her, beside the peacock and before the modeling dais — "I am a woman whose statue you would spoil. See, the heat of the stoves is drying it already. I beg you, make haste."

The words are those of reproof, but their intonation is gentle as a caress.

In an instant Merreshoff is at her side; he attempts to take her hands in his; then, as she retreats — "Forgive me," he cries; "you said your life and soul were bound up in your statue. It can be so no more if you will listen to my love. Look, — I will keep it moist now, and we will set the peasants to it during your absence." Merreshoff fills the basin and pours it over the clay. "There, so; now let me tell you all that is in my heart."

"Another time," returns the woman, gently withdrawing. "But now to your mission. You seek my assistance in capturing Sasha Serdobin. But first I must know more of him, his plans, affairs,— his love for Sonya Frioff. Would you believe it? well as I knew her, the ingrate, she has never breathed a word of all this to me!" Her perfect lips part in a smile so dazzling as to blind the beholder to the fact that her eyes are mirthless. "Tell me," she continues, "how knew you of this romance?"

"Easily enough; Sonya Frioff is also a friend of mine; her father and mine are brothers in arms. Sonya and I grew up together; 'tis from her lips that I have learned the story of Sasha Serdobin's love; from her lips that I learned of thee —"

"Yes, yes!" murmurs Kara; "but first tell me more of Sonya. You see," with a laugh, "I am quite a woman in my interest in affairs of the heart." The look that rounds out her sentence goes to the head of Merreshoff like wine.

"More? What can I say more? That I have seen one of his letters to her, that they are madly passionate?"

"Seen one of his letters," the woman echoes. Her laughter rings out so clear and long that she is fain to clutch her side

from the pain of it. "You jest with me! As though a woman would show her love letters to a man, even her foster-brother."

"Nay," says Merreshoff, his hand seeking his breast pocket, "I said not 'show.' In the performance of our duty we must sometimes intercept a letter, you know — "

"And you have one there. You will let me see it?" She bends toward Merreshoff, her jeweled hand outstretched, her eyes shining with a meaning that he cannot fathom. In the folds of her gown her other hand is clutched as in the death agony.

For the space of a pulse-beat Merreshoff stands as still as the statue yonder. Then, very slowly, he draws from its hiding place a crumpled letter and presses it into the hand of the countess. "Poor Sonya," he murmurs. "But what would you? Friendship is one thing and patriotism another. And you see, by his own words, he stands convicted as a traitor."

The countess answers not a word, but Merreshoff, watching her, notes that her fingers tremble, — doubtless with the agitation of a loyal subject confronted with evidence of treachery to her country. It seems to him, too, that as her eyes glance down the page, devouring the words, a veil settles over her face. It pales slightly, evidently under the blow to her patriotism, while her lips set themselves as rigidly as though of chiseled marble. As the full import of that which she reads is borne in upon her she bursts into a laugh harsh as the note of the peacock strutting near. Then, folding the paper carefully, she returns it to him who stands waiting, silent, but with glowing eyes. "Patriotism, yes, patriotism, that is the thing," she echoes, while she summons all her strength of will to control the burning thoughts that seethe through her brain. "Yes, it was worth your intercepting and my reading. Not as a love letter — no. Indeed, it sounds to me like one copied — like one I have read somewhere before. But it convicts — oh, yes; it convicts him as a traitor, as you say!" A tide of color suffuses her face now. Her head is thrown back, her nostrils are dilated, her eyes superbly scornful.

"Then I may rely upon you to help me," eagerly cries Merreshoff. "Yes? Ah, that is well. Until now he has ever eluded us by the help of this will-o'-the-wisp boy, Ivor, who seems to stand

between him and capture. But with thy wit we shall soon have him, and poor Sonya can get a new sweetheart, of course."

"Of course," returns the countess carelessly; then turning to the platform, she adds: "But see how quickly the heat dries up the moisture! I almost could think I saw my statue tremble."

Merreshoff's gaze is riveted on her rather than on the clay.

"Suppose," she goes on in a slow, monotonous voice, as of one improvising, "suppose one captured this Sasha Serdobin and brought him here, and instead of the stick of wood we sculptors use as a support in beginning a statue, we should use Sasha Serdobin, and cover him with clay, and pile him thick with it, and keep him moist for many hours, alive, able to breathe through the lips, the ears, the nostrils, and then if we should cease giving the water to the clay, and pile the fires higher in the stoves, and so — and so —" She laughs a long, high laugh as she throws herself down at the foot of the Glinka. "Would not that be a very excellent punishment for — a traitor — General, eh?"

Merreshoff laughs. "You remind me that I must pour more water here." He lifts the bucket, but the peacock, flapping to his wrist to drink, causes him to drop the bucket, and the water splashes over Kara Kalefsky, who shivers slightly.

Then perhaps they both forget the statue.

At its base Merreshoff tells out all his passion and hope unrestrainedly to her. She listens impassively yet not unwillingly. It must be but passing sweet to listen thus to love's new, strange story in the very teeth of a love that once looked quite as fair.

Food was brought and they ate it, giving the peacock his share; wine was brought and they drank it, leaving the cup half full. Wood was brought and the fires replenished, so that, as the day wore on, the warmth was intense, full of comfort and drowsiness.

At last Merreshoff, half content, half disquieted, as men must be whom women permit to uncover their souls without giving any return save the tacit one of listening,— Merreshoff left Kara sitting there. He was to return for her at nine o'clock, when they were to start for Moscow under escort by the nearest railway.

The curtains fell together, waving after him.

The countess sat still for a moment, holding her temples with her hands; then she rose, tottering, and got up on the ladder, her

face averted from the clay statue, and pushed open the snow-weighted skylight. The freezing air came in to her gratefully, as she climbed down and stood still under the open dome.

"Now have I lived to be old, old as Katinka. Now have I outlived hunger, thirst," — the peacock still picked at the crumbs of oat cake, and she steadied the cup of wine lest he should spill it in his eagerness, — "weariness, rest, good or evil, heaven or hell, hope or remorse — " Kara raised her eyes to the deep sky above her; there shone the copper moon, tipped a little to one side, as if in mockery of all the world below. In its light her face showed drawn and lined like that of an old woman. Then of a sudden, the tide of long-ebbed feeling seemed to sweep back upon her. She rushed over to the statue, she snatched the cup of wine and moistened the parched lips, she took the other bucket and dashed the water over the head, she tore at the clay, she called: —

"Sasha! Sasha!"

Would the dried, baked crust yield? Had the spirit forever fled from the being encased in the clay? With all her supreme young strength, Kara Kalefsky cast her arms around the stolid pillar, and fought the imprisoning impassive mass with the weight of her body.

Would the incarcerated one give an answering throe?

She wailed, she shrieked.

From without there came the hurrying tramp of the guards left by Merreshoff. She had forgotten Merreshoff and his men utterly.

One last bitter superhuman effort — and — anon, the peacock screamed and strutted, the copper moon waxed redder in the deep sky, and the blown snow whirled over the vast dismalness of the marsh.

Westward Ho!

BY J. WESLEY GLOVER.

OU see, it all came about this way. There has been, the past year and a half, a sort of birthday-party craze in our neighborhood. Nearly everybody of prominence in the township had had a surprise party except me. Old Squire Morrill, Uncle Rufus Parton, Joe Leavitt, and nearly all the rest had been honored, and in each case I had done my best to make the event successful, so I began to think that my time was coming next, especially as my birthday was drawing near.

Now I am not a perfect man, but I am a very modest man, so I did not throw out any hints in an open way, but still made no secret of when my birthday was due, and perhaps I allowed it to be generally understood that I was not going to be away from home on that day. I am not the sort of a man to get angry at being suddenly surprised by his fellow-citizens with a lot of presents and good things to eat.

Before long I saw little signs that looked as though my hints had taken root, so to speak; but I didn't feel quite sure of it until one day, being in conversation with a neighbor in regard to the time when we were boys, he, pretending to be very innocent, of course, asked how old I was. Then I knew at once what he was driving at, and realized that I was in for it.

However, it is my nature to let others show their deepest feelings while I keep mine carefully concealed. So I didn't let on that I suspected anything, but I kept my eyes perfectly wide open watching for further symptoms, and, being gifted with the faculty of putting two and two together, I saw plenty of them.

Did you ever notice how easy it is to see signs of things that are going to happen, when you know how and where to look for them? And it doesn't take much imagination, either. If it had, I should have been the last man to notice them, for I never was

much on imagination. I have always left that to women and poets. It is because I have what scientists call an observing mind that I see meaning in what looks like accident to other folks.

But to return to my surprise party. With half an eye I could see indications that there was going to be the biggest birthday surprise party that had been in the township for a long time. And didn't I deserve it? Hadn't I been a highly respectable citizen all my life? Hadn't I filled the public offices of coroner and inspector of roads for four years each; and hadn't I been the ringleader in all the other surprise parties for the last fifteen months? I just knew that those fellows whom I had gotten up surprise parties on were going to get even with me now.

Why, there was not a man, woman, or child, but who, when they met me, seemed to look at me in a knowing sort of way, as if they were thinking, "Look out, old fellow, we'll surprise you one of these days," while I would quietly laugh all to myself, thinking how they were fooled. I had a notion sometimes to let on that I knew all about it, but I thought that probably I had better not, and now I am mighty glad I didn't.

Well, the more I put my observing mind to work, the more signs I discovered. Of course, to the man who, as I said, can put two and two together, a birthday surprise party naturally suggests presents. So when I happened to be in the village store one day, and a lady who lives not far from me came in to buy a shaving mug, I knew what it meant, when, upon seeing me, she blushed and hesitated.

Of course that mug was meant for me!

Well, as luck would have it, the very next day I was in that same store, and I saw Squire Morrill's wife buying one, too. Then I began to be afraid it was going to be overdone in shaving mugs, especially as I hadn't shaved any nigh onto ten years, though my wife often wanted me to, and so did my daughter Sarah; and I thought the neighborhood must be of the same opinion, and was going to give me a strong hint along that line.

I didn't feel just plumb sure of it, though, until a day or so after, when, just strolling into the store by chance, I found John Price, who lives over near the woods above my place, buying another shaving mug. When I saw that I had a great notion to

call his attention to some other handsome things I wanted, as being more suitable for presents, but I hated to hurt his feelings by showing that I'd found out what they were trying to hide from me. Besides, as Grimm, the storekeeper, had just gotten in a lot of mugs and was making a specialty of them by advertising to sell them at cost, I concluded they had a perfect right to buy them for me because they were the cheapest things that were suitable for a man.

After all, it was a pleasure to think of the lots of presents I was going to receive, but I wondered what I would do with all those shaving mugs. It finally occurred to me that I could exchange some of my duplicate birthday presents for something more fitting, all on the quiet, of course, without giving offense to the donors.

About this time I told several of my townspeople that I had a great notion to get myself a nice cuckoo clock, or rocking chair, or gold-headed cane, but if they took the hint, they never let on. Well, as my birthday drew near, you have no idea how kindly I felt towards my neighbors, and what an era of good feeling stole over me as I realized that they were all so intent on creating happiness for me. Pretty soon I thought I had better, in a general way, make ready for the occasion, so I began to fix up things about the place, and I was surprised to find how many things needed fixing. In the first place, knowing there'd be lots of teams, I set out six new hitching posts in front of our place. Then I remembered there would be some people of prominence here that always keep things nice at home, and so I fixed up a lot of gates and bars that had been off their hinges for a long time, and attended to some other needed repairs that I had somehow overlooked before. It is wonderful how the prospect of a lot of agreeable company sets your mind to working, till you can't get along a day without things you haven't missed in years. That was the case with me, anyway.

No sooner had I got things straight outside than I began to notice how sort of old and bare everything looked inside compared to the houses of some of those who would be sure to visit us. The parlor wall paper, in particular, looked so faded and streaked, owing to a leak in the roof during the flood spring before last, I wondered how I could have stood it so long, and I made up my

mind I would surprise my wife by papering that room all over new. By the time that was done the other rooms looked so old fashioned that I had to put new paper on the dining room and sitting room also. And that wasn't all. Before my wife got through exclaiming over this surprise, I had got to feeling so in a glow at seeing things look nice and thinking how they would impress my surprisers, that I went straight off and bought her a plush rocking chair, a marble-top table, and a set of blue and red tumblers for lemonade. Then remembering all of a sudden that we'd neglected literature and art all the years I had been serving my township as coroner and road inspector, I sent to the city and surprised my wife with a picture called "The Monarch of the Glen," and for my daughter I got two volumes of "Garlands of Verse" for the new center table. I also bought a supply of lemons, raisins, citron peel, flavoring extracts, a sack of XXX pastry flour, and borrowed two gallons of elderberry wine from a man up the road whom I had helped coon hunting last fall.

When my wife wanted to know what was the matter with me, I threw her off the trail by telling her that, all of a sudden, I was feeling young again and wanted a feast such as mother used to give me. Finally, I made up my mind to surprise my wife further by cutting a lot of fire-wood, and, in fact, she seemed more astonished and tickled at this than at anything I had done. But when I came to examine the ax I was a good deal disgusted and discouraged. My folks never were much on keeping an ax sharp, anyway, and ours looked as though it hadn't seen a grindstone for nearly a year, and how we had cut the wood all that time was a mystery to me. It is certainly a sign of a lazy person to work with such a dull tool, but I didn't like to speak of it then, for I didn't want to make any hard feelings just before my surprise party.

Well, I worked away fixing up till my hands were full of blisters, but I at last got everything round the place in apple-pie order, and then all there was to do was to wait with patience the expected day.

I had, with my store clothes on, practised before the looking glass on the surprised look I intended to wear, and had it all down fine, even to the smile.

My suspicions were strongly confirmed every day, for even in

the kitchen I could see that something unusual was taking place.

My birthday comes on the thirteenth, and on the morning of the twelfth Maria — that's my wife — said she wanted me to go to town that day to take a lot of butter and eggs, but I knew it was only a blinder to get me away all the morning, so they could get ready unbeknownst to me; but I never let on, and in order to help them along so they could have plenty of time to get things up in shape, I told her I would also go on to see a cousin of mine about some things, and would not be back till evening. I thought that probably, as my cousin lived over in the next township, they would forget to invite his folks, so I decided to go over and let him know what was going to happen at our place, that he and his wife might come over and see the fun.

I got back a little earlier than I expected, and sure enough, as I went into the kitchen, they not hearing me until I opened the door, I saw my daughter Sarah run off in the pantry with a big chocolate cake. I called her back and let on I was awful cross — they wasting their time baking expensive chocolate cakes; then Sarah began to cry, and said that I never allowed her to have any fun, and that she had promised to go to a picnic, and wouldn't go if she couldn't even take a cake; but I understand women's little ways, and didn't say much, for I knew it was all put on.

The great day was finally ushered in. I couldn't stay in bed that morning, so I got up early, and as I went out to the barn just as it was getting daylight, I fancied that the sun shone a little brighter than usual; the birds seemed to sing a little sweeter; the roosters seemed to crow a little louder, and the old gobbler seemed to feel his importance more than ever; but in all this I might have been mistaken. I was a little excited, I must confess, and under such circumstances a man is liable to be mistaken.

I thought I would keep busy around the house and barn, so as to let on that I suspected nothing, until near the time they would come. I knew they would be here about ten o'clock, and make a full day of it, for that is the way they always do on these occasions; and, sure enough, about half past nine a neighbor's boy came to borrow a cup of risings for bread. He did not see me, but I heard him ask how I was. Of course I knew this was only to find out if I was at home, and I looked for the crowd pretty soon.

After the boy had gone, my wife asked me to go up to the other end of our woods and get her some sage leaves for tea. I laughed to myself, for I knew that that was only a trick — the last straw — to get me out of sight of the house until the people came, and then have me surprised by seeing the whole house full when I came back. But I kept quiet, and started off with the basket to get the sage leaves, though the thought did come to me that I would be sort of ashamed to be seen with those old clothes on by all the people and their families, who would, of course, be dressed up for the party. In fact, I had a notion to go back to the house and sneak out my good clothes to the barn to put on when I came back; but on second thought I gave up the plan, as I knew that it would let the cat out of the bag, as the saying is.

To give the folks plenty of time to get all nicely fixed in the house before I got back, I took my time and gathered a big basketful of sage leaves before I started back, practising, as I went along, my surprised look. When I got to the barn I could see no signs of them yet, but it struck me that they had tied their horses to the new hitching posts out along the road in front of the house where I couldn't see them, and were all in the parlor. And sure enough, as I started toward the house I saw the parlor shutters, that were always closed excepting when we have company, wide open.

"Ha! Ha! don't they keep quiet, though," I thought to myself, "but there'll be music in the air in a few minutes." And, just as I expected, there was my wife standing in the kitchen door, all excited like. As I came up, she said: "There are some folks in the parlor come to see us." I smiled all to myself and started for the parlor, knowing it would be full of people. But where were my eyes? When I opened the door, all I saw was Cousin John and his wife, and not another living soul! As soon as they saw me they both cried: "Happy birthday!" and before I could catch his eye, Cousin John exclaimed: "Where are all the rest of the people that you told us about yesterday?"

I could have sunk through the floor as my wife looked at me. I felt as if she saw through the wall paper, and the plush chair, and the firewood, and the "Garland of Verses," and the worst of it was, I felt as if she saw through me.

We had dinner at twelve, and still nobody came. I can tell

you I felt weak in the knees, and couldn't eat much dinner, though we had the red and blue tumblers, and two pies and a cake made of my surprise bag of flour.

Well, would you believe it? the whole day passed and not another person made his or her appearance. Not another man, woman, or child, or anybody else, and I was never more surprised in all my life. Why, I wouldn't have been near as much surprised if the whole township had turned itself loose on me. I was disgusted with the whole business, but what am I to do about it? I feel that I have been abused and misused by those whom I have served so faithfully, and I want revenge, — revenge is the word, — and if there is anything like getting it, I will have it.

I would at once bring suit against the whole township, but hardly know how to bring it. It would scarcely come under the head of breach of promise, because nobody actually promised me anything, though their actions did speak louder than words. A case of false pretense might be made out, but that is hard to establish unless you can get the right kind of a lawyer. But I believe conspiracy with intent to make me feel bad would be pretty near the mark, and in all probability it will be brought in that shape.

When I go to town next week with another lot of butter and eggs, I'll ask my lawyer if there is any chance of recovering the money I paid out for those hitching posts and so forth. And there may be a separation in our family pretty soon, too, for even to this day, whenever I hear a wagon coming up the road and happen to say, "I wonder who that is," my wife exclaims, "Why, Ephraim, I guess it is somebody coming to your surprise party." That is why I am seriously thinking of taking the advice offered by the founder of the New York *Tribune* and — Go West.

The Captain's Gray.

BY ELLA F. MOSBY.

HERE is a strange tale of the night after a bloody conflict, when the horses of two opposing cavalry regiments, having been but carelessly picketed, broke loose, and in the uncertain light of the camp-fires again engaged in a fierce struggle. Screaming, biting, charging with desperate courage, they renewed the conflict of the day, not allowing themselves to be separated until more than half their number lay dead or disabled on the field. Whether this be true or not, certain it is that the more intelligent cavalry horses learn to love the wild excitement and thrill of war, and even imbibe somewhat of the *esprit de corps* of their owners. My own mare — beautiful and spirited creature — I have often seen tingle from head to foot at the first bugle-note of "Boots and Saddles." It would have taken a strong hand to hold her back.

My story, however, is not of her, but of our captain's gray, a powerful and fiery horse, the finest in our regiment for speed, bottom, brain, and pluck. Despite an imperturbably grave air, he was continually playing tricks, especially on the other horses.

When his master threw himself down on the ground to rest, his horse would lie down beside him, either lovingly, and lightly, laying his head on the captain's breast to be patted, or else searching his pockets for bits of bread and sugar, and if these were not forthcoming, stealing his master's handkerchief and pretending to hide it.

The captain was a reserved and apparently a lonely man. His horse was, in fact, his only intimate friend, and when in the second year of the war the captain was killed — shot dead in his saddle while returning from a reconnoitering expedition — his gray followed him to the grave.

I succeeded as captain, and somehow it seemed natural that I

should take care of the horse, though I never rode him. He went with his old company, however, just the same. If he were fastened anywhere when we were called to mount, he made such an awful row that I couldn't stand it. I ended by letting him go loose just as his master had done; he always came instantly at a certain whistle, and was perfectly obedient so long as you did not try to send him back. At every drill, on every march, he kept his old place, or as near it as possible. One night we were going through a tangled bit of timber, hardly daring to breathe, much less speak, when the gray threw up his head with a loud snort.

At once the whole wood was alive before us with men firing on every side. In another moment we should have been surrounded and retreat impossible. As it was, we barely cut our way out, the gray literally fighting by my side. A ghostly sort of fight it was; the new moon just up, and in the glimmering light everything shadowy and confused, friends and foes, horses and riders.

"By God, the last captain did us a good turn!" exclaimed one of the men when we were fairly beyond shot.

"The last captain! What do you mean?" I asked.

"Beg pardon, nothing, sir. Only," hesitating, "'twas the captain's gray give that cry; we'd been in, headforemost, but for that!"

After that I had a curious feeling all through the action that, if I only turned quickly enough, I should see a shadowy rider upon the shadowy gray, though, as for the matter of that, we were all shadows in the dusky, half-lit wood.

On Sunday morning,— the third since the captain's death — the great battle began. I am not naturally a soldier, feeling always an instinctive shrinking from the hideous details of war, the screaming shell, the sharp steel, the tramping down of the horses on human flesh. I had an opportunity to realize all these horrors as our cavalry, held in reserve, waited five mortal hours, — no food, no water, no rest, for me at least, for my nerves were strung to the highest pitch by the continuous roar and rattle of cannon and musketry, the rumble of heavy wagons, confused cries and groans, all the hellish sounds of conflict. The smoke hung thick over the field, the air was stifling with the smell of gunpowder, as at a thunder storm in a cheap theater. Slightly

to our right was a hill from which the enemy poured hot and fast a rain of death. We were as yet protected by the woods, though a ghastly fringe of the dead lay without the shelter. All at once I saw a rider detach himself from a group still farther to our left, and ride at a gallop towards us. I knew instantly what it meant: orders to go down into the raging, seething inferno, from which, now and then as the wind blew, the smoke lifted and revealed its horrors. He rode straight to our colonel, saluted, said a few words, saluted again, and rode back, not perceptibly the faster because he was the living target for a hundred rifles.

Our colonel turned to us: "We must take those guns, boys. After we leave these woods, you cannot hear any orders, but there is no need. That's all. *Take the guns!*"

There was a whirl, a plunge, a dash forward. I remember my mare gave a wild snort of joy as she rushed on, and that the gray was abreast. We were in the midst of it instantly, shells bursting, the earth dashed in our faces as it was ploughed up, the man beside me was down, there was a cry of "*Close up ranks!*" a scream, another gap, we closed up, and again and again wide rents were torn asunder as we went on, and again closed. Suddenly my own mare was down. I clutched at the floating mane of the gray that loomed above me, and was up again; but somebody else had drawn rein. The line wavered, was on the verge of wheeling in blind, hopeless panic before the face of death, when, all at once, the gray horse threw his head high in air, uttered a loud, piercing neigh, like a fierce challenge, and dashed on with the fury of a whirlwind. The others followed with one mad impulse, in which I was borne irresistibly on, striking instinctively with my saber at every opposing figure, but hardly with conscious intentions; and the next moment I was over the low earthworks, among the guns. My comrades — all who were left — were close behind me, and the hill was ours!

It is said that this charge was the turning-point of the whole battle. I was promoted for bravery on the field, and for awhile, at least, counted a hero. Yet, so far as any purpose of mine or any voluntary action were concerned, why, I knew no more than the dead! No more than the dead? Perhaps not so much.

M'Goulighan.

BY FRANCIS LYNDE.

HESE things came to pass in the year when Jasper came to its own again, and the county offices of Benton were removed from Oreville to their former quarters in the older town. That was in the reign of Bart Dugger, sheriff, and George Lawton, his deputy.

Jasper had been first a "cow town," afterward a railway supply station for Oreville, and, later still, when the mining camp sickened and died of inanition, and the network of the English syndicate's irrigation canals cobwebbed the valley, the market town of a not over-populous but growing ranch district.

Dugger, the sheriff, was a weather-worn relic of the cattle era. Sparing of speech to the verge of sullenness, and with a record for violence not overborne by that of any man on the St. Vrain, he was, none the less, a good officer; harsh in discipline, but instant in action, and fighting as cheerfully on the side of law and order as in the past he had now and again fought otherwise.

Lawton, the deputy, was a fresher importation, dating back only to the rush following the discovery of mineral in Quinchito Cañon. He was a young man, hailing from one of the smaller cities of the Middle West, and had come to Colorado to make haste to be rich. Failing in this, like some other thousands of his fellow-migrants, he would fain do what he could; and when the Quinchito "petered out," and Dugger offered him the deputyship, he accepted the offer not ungratefully.

"I'm not the man you want," he had said to Dugger's overture; "but I'll take it and hold it down as long as I can. When I make the break I'm sure to, sooner or later, you can let me out."

"It's my play," said Dugger laconically.

"I know — and you usually play to win; but I'm afraid you won't this time."

Lawton's protest was based upon an impartial estimate of his own character. Nature had cast him for a man of peace, and had spoiled the design by spilling rather more than one man's proportion of self-consciousness into the mold. The result was as if the soul of a soldier had somehow got entangled in the body of a swineherd, to use Lawton's own metaphor. Curious things came of the entanglement, and oftenest this: that he was not infrequently pushed headlong into doing a rash thing from sheer fear that he should otherwise fail to be reasonably courageous.

That was the case in the capture of M'Goulighan, over which Jasper waxed eloquent. On the night of April 19, the Quinchito Bank was burglarized, and the burglar — there was but one — was discovered in the act by the night watchman. Thereupon the man dropped his booty, exchanged complimentary shots with the watchman, and made a successful dash for liberty.

The following day word was brought to Sheriff Dugger that the robber was entrenched in an abandoned mine in the cañon. Dugger was for organizing a posse forthwith, and went out to do it, but Lawton lagged behind to question the informer. The abandoned mine chanced to be one in which the deputy had worked, and he was suddenly confronted with a hazard which a brave man might have creditably refused, but which a conscientious coward was bound to accept. Therefore Lawton accepted it, hiring a saddle-horse at Allen's stables and riding away toward the foothills an hour in advance of the posse.

Half way to the cañon, Dugger and his company, riding hard, met the deputy coming in with his prisoner. Questioned on the spot by five men in a breath, Lawton was modestly reticent; but later, in the privacy of the sheriff's office, he expanded.

"He was in the old Alamo tunnel, with the entrance barricaded — what for, the Lord only knows. If he'd gone in and left things as he found them, nobody would ever have thought of looking there for him. As you may remember, there is an air shaft in the Alamo three hundred feet or such a matter up the hill; I slid down that and stalked him from behind. That's all."

"Fight?" said the sheriff, relighting his cigar.

Lawton shook his head. "Another man might have given him a show, but I couldn't afford to. I called him down with a gun."

The sheriff's impassive face lightened, and he laughed under his drooping mustache. "You're a hell of a coward," he said, and then he broke his taciturn habit and went out to tell the town what it was waiting to learn.

It was a bi-weekly scrub day in the Benton County jail when the armored door opened to admit M'Goulighan. Two of the prisoners, barefooted, and with their trousers rolled knee high, were swabbing the stone floor; and the others, a score or more, were perched in the windows, on the pyramid of stools piled against the wall, and elsewhere, out of the swabbers' way.

Three steps led down from the iron-clad door to the floor of the corridor, and on the lowest of these M'Goulighan paused to look about him. There was scant welcome in the eyes that met his scowling stare — for cause. M'Goulighan was not prepossessing; and even the inmates of a jail may have their ideas of social distinctions. Wherefore the score or more scowled in return, and omitted to demand the customary entrance fee of tobacco, usually exacted of newcomers.

M'Goulighan noted the omission and emphasized his contempt by ostentatiously taking a chew from an unbitten plug; after which he turned his attention to the swabbers.

"Say, time youse fellies been over de road oncet 'r twicet youse'll know more 'bout swabbin' down dan ye do now," he remarked, kicking the nearest bucket to the end of the corridor. "Slide yer machin'ry out o' de way till I can git across to me boudwar."

That was the beginning of a jail tyranny, and the barelegged ones knew it and were minded to rebel. But a second glance at M'Goulighan's brutal face with its projecting under jaw and ferret-like eyes quelled the insurrectionary prompting once for all, and M'Goulighan's despotic reign began from that moment.

It was an ill wind which had blown the housebreaker to Colorado. It was in no sense a migration in intention; it was merely a flying trip, taken to give certain roiled waters in his Eastern haunts time to settle. And, that his hand might not lose its cunning meantime, he had come to Jasper and sought a little diversion at the expense of the stockholders of the Quinchito Bank.

He was, therefore, not of the West, its time, place, or people. On the contrary, he was distinctly urban and metropolitan in his

tastes and habits, and it irked him to be jailed in a crude Western town where prison usages were primitive and the discipline unenlightened. For this cause he became "first assistant corp'ral on de inside," as Shorty Riley phrased it, from the day of his introduction, bullying the others by word of mouth chiefly, but threatening eviler things to follow the first complaint to Lawton. Gradually, and by sheer force of abuse, he made good his claim to leadership; and when the time was fully ripe he proposed a wholesale jail delivery by way of breaking the monotony.

The scheme met with opposition at first, principally from those who were serving short sentences; but M'Goulighan finally overruled this, and when he was sure of support, he drilled and organized his recruits, fitting each man to his place in a clockwork-like system which was a masterpiece in its way.

For a time all went well. The turnkey was an unobservant man, and M'Goulighan's system easily befooled him. The great door in the corridor was reinforced by an iron grating on the outside, a blacksmith's contrivance with an old-fashioned lock which gave timely and plenteous warning of the jailer's approach. So Prescott, the turnkey, came and went and saw nothing amiss; and even Lawton, who made a daily inspection, was slow to yield to a growing sense of impending trouble. When he did yield the premonition took shape, and the daily inspection became a painstaking search for a clue to M'Goulighan's mystery.

But for all the deputy's vigilance the clue was not immediately forthcoming. Time and again he made quick sallies at odd hours into the inner corridor, hoping to surprise whatever undertaking was afoot, but always without success. There was never anything amiss. However cautiously he made his approach, he always found the prisoners scattered about the corridor, playing cards, whittling, dozing on the cots, each apparently fighting the daily battle with prison ennui in the most ordinary manner.

It was only by chance that he finally remarked one suspicious circumstance. It was that the card players were invariably beginning a game when he entered. It was but a straw, but it pointed suspicion, and he racked his brain to devise some means of spying upon the corridor from without. That, too, proved impossible. The jail had been built in primitive days by stone-masons who

were not prison architects, and for security rather than espionage. More than once he was tempted to take counsel of the sheriff, but humanity restrained him. He knew Dugger's temper, and that a word from him would send the men into solitary confinement.

In the end Lawton decided upon a master-stroke. Taking Prescott into his confidence, he set a trap for M'Goulighan in this wise. One morning, during inspection, he ordered Prescott to the other end of the town to make an appointment for him with a certain mythical personage, name not given. "Tell him I'll be there in fifteen minutes, and then wait till I come; I may want you," he added in a low tone for M'Goulighan's benefit.

The ruse was successful. When the outer grating clanged behind Lawton, M'Goulighan climbed to a window commanding a view of the street, waited until he saw the deputy on his way down town, and then gave the signal.

"Fall in, fellies; it's de clear track we've got till wan o' de two comes back," he said.

At the word the every-day aspect of the place vanished. One man took his place on the steps with his ear against the iron-clad door; two more posted themselves each at a window; and the others formed a line from the stove to an unused cell, with four men on their knees with their fingers under the zinc, and another supporting the pipe with a wire. M'Goulighan nodded, and the heavy stove slid aside, revealing a circle on the floor with a finger-hole in the center. The housebreaker lifted the trap and dropped quickly into the excavation beneath it.

"Gimme de tools; dere's daylight —"

The interruption was the unheralded opening of the armored door. It was flung back so suddenly that the sentinel went down on the flagging with a yell of pain and dismay, and Lawton and the turnkey, stocking-footed, sprang into the corridor and locked the door behind them. M'Goulighan climbed out of the tunnel with the air of one who knows when he is fairly worsted.

"Got me down, Cap'n, didn't ye?" he said, grinning, "but I'm tellin' youse der wasn't no time to burn"; then, to his fellow-bondmen, with a foreknowledge born of penitential experience, "Jig's up, cullies, git in yer cells; dat's de nex' t'ing to do."

It was not only the next, but it would have been the last as re-

gards corridor liberty for that lot of prisoners, had not Lawton labored manfully with Dugger. The sheriff would have decreed solitary confinement and bread and water, but the deputy prevailed; and when the repairs were completed, the cells were once more thrown open. It was Lawton himself who unlocked M'Goulighan's door and gave him the freedom of the corridor. The housebreaker's experience in similar affairs had not been of the sort to soften him, but he was evidently moved.

"Say, Cap'n, what ye givin' us?" he demanded, when Lawton told him to get out and stretch his legs.

"What you had before you made your break," said Lawton.

"D' 'ell ye say; I ain't onto no such t'ing as dat; n'r you bet I ain't givin' no p'role," said M'Goulighan.

Lawton took that as a mere declaration of rights and passed it over in silence; but afterward a curious glimmering of friendship came and went between the hardened sinner and his captor. It was a friendship quite undefinable in stated terms, commonplace or otherwise. But it existed, nevertheless, and Lawton knew it and wondered what buried grain of gold he had chanced to upturn in the heart of a man whose blood was of Ishmael, and whose hand was against every man's.

He spoke of it one evening when he was out driving with Kate Warburton behind the judge's span of mettlesome thoroughbreds. They had been as far as the mouth of the cañon, and the sight of the abandoned Alamo had suggested M'Goulighan.

"It's odd, and I shouldn't encourage it, if I were you," said Kate, with the privileged frankness of a fiancée. "Perhaps he's only biding his time to do you up." The judge's daughter was Western born, and the slang borrowed dignity from the fact.

"I might suspect that if he wasn't always taking pains to keep me from finding out," rejoined Lawton.

"Then how do you know?"

"In many ways. For instance, he has been the jail bully ever since the first day of his confinement; but whereas he used to stir up trouble for Prescott and the rest of us, he now tyrannizes on the side of discipline. Moreover, latterly he has been letting me get glimpses of things that you wouldn't expect to find in a man of his breed."

"Like what?" Kate asked.

Lawton pitched upon the best-remembered incident. "One morning, when I was making my round, he was standing at a window staring up at the sky with a look in his eyes that I'd never seen in them before. As a matter of fact, his eyes are his worst feature; you would as soon look for purely human longings in those of a wolf. I was passing him with a nod, when he said: 'Say, Cap'n, don't it never rain in dis bloomin' country?' I told him it did, on occasion, and he broke out with an oath: 'Say, I'd be givin' one o' me front teeth to see de green grass growin', an' de trees, an' all dat again, I would, by cripes, Cap'n.' And then he went on to ask what kind of a place Cañon City is, and if there were more trees and grass, and fewer mountains."

Kate's sympathies were aroused, and she wanted to hear more.

"It's hard to particularize," said Lawton. "It's only a word here and there, or a look; and most of the time he is still the hardened outlaw that he has to be. He doesn't say much, and when he does talk it is usually about his trial and how much time he is likely to get."

"How much will he get?"

"I don't know; the full limit, I suppose. He has served two terms in Eastern prisons, and that will go against him."

Now Kate Warburton was of those who have drunk at the fountain of mercy, and from that evening M'Goulighan had an intercessor that he little dreamed of. Being her father's housekeeper, Kate had the judge at a disadvantage, and, watching her chances, introduced the thin edge of the wedge of leniency so deftly that the shrewd old lawyer never suspected her design. Afterward, she drove the wedge with gentle tappings; and a week before the trial, gave way to a natural desire to see the man whom she was trying to befriend. Accordingly, the following morning the judge's thoroughbreds paused before the jail, and Lawton, who was on duty in the office, hastened out bareheaded.

"What is it?" he asked, reading a purpose in Kate's eyes.

"Not the sight of you," she said hardily, laughing in his face. "I came to see Mr. M'Goulighan."

"You can't," said Lawton; "he's not receiving. Besides, you haven't brought any cut flowers."

"Nonsense! I don't want to *meet* him. Be still, will you!" — this to the off thoroughbred, who was trying to dance a quick-step on the edge of the curbstone. "But I want to see him, just the same. Can't you arrange it?"

Lawton glanced up at the barred windows of the jail, and turned with his foot on the hub. "Wait a minute, so that he won't catch on, then look at the third window in the lower tier."

Kate nodded, and toyed with the whip to kill time. The off thoroughbred heard the swish of the lash, and rose on his hind legs in indignant protest. Lawton was at his bit in a twinkling; and when peace was restored he went back to the wheel with a warning on his tongue.

"You take too many chances driving these bays," he said. "It's no woman's outfit, and they'll smash you up some day."

Kate's lip curled in pardonable scorn. Then she laughed. "I haven't been driving broncos ever since I can remember to be afraid of a Kentuckian — or two of them," she said. "I've never had a runaway in my life."

Then her gaze wandered to the third window in the lower tier, and she saw M'Goulighan. For the moment sympathy went adrift, and she shuddered.

"Mercy," she said, under her breath, "what a face! It's bad, *bad*. I think you must be mistaken, George."

"In M'Goulighan? I think not. You must remember that I haven't claimed much for him; not more than a 'color' or two of gold in a panful of very common clay."

"I know; but his face doesn't show even that. Do be careful, George; I'm sure he is only biding his time."

"For what? He is well looked after."

"Yes, now; but you will have to take him to Cañon City, won't you, after the trial?"

"I suppose so."

"That will be his last chance, and he looks terrible enough to do anything. Don't let your sympathy make you careless."

Lawton smiled rather grimly. "Carelessness where my own personal safety is concerned is not one of my failings. What would you have me do?"

"Oh, I don't know; but if I were a man, and had it to do, I

should never lose sight of him for a moment. And if he tried to do anything, I'd — "

"Shoot him in cold blood, I suppose," said Lawton, with mock ferocity. Then he laughed and sent her away with an added word of caution about the horses. But later, when he was once more smoking his cigar in the office, her words bore fruit. What if, after all, the housebreaker were only paving the way for a last desperate dash for liberty? He must know well enough that he would be sent to the penitentiary, and that the deputy would be on his guard on the journey; the other prisoners could tell him that. What more natural, therefore, than that he should seek to lull suspicion beforehand by such small means as he could command?

In considering it, Lawton fell once more under the spell of his weakness. He lacked a brave man's magnanimity, and, knowing it, took counsel of that prudence which is the twin sister of ruthless suspicion. When it should come to making the journey with M'Goulighan, he would take no chances; and the convict himself should be made to understand.

At his trial M'Goulighan pleaded guilty, and otherwise demeaned himself as a man who had made up his mind beforehand to give the prosecution as little trouble as might be. His attitude, nullified in part, as it was bound to be by his crime-branded face, had its effect on the jury; and there was the merest suggestion of a recommendation to judicial clemency in the foreman's announcement of the verdict. The seed of suggestion fell in fertile soil, prepared for it aforetime by the judge's daughter, and the burglar got seven years instead of ten.

He was not sentenced in court; it was Lawton who told him on the eve of the journey to Cañon City.

"It's light, as you know, Mac," said the deputy. "You shot at the watchman, and that wasn't taken into account."

M'Goulighan nodded. "I ain't kickin'," he said briefly.

"You've no reason to kick. Judge Warburton did the best he could for you."

The burglar nodded again. "De judge, he was square; I ain't sayin' a word, am I? But it was de young lady what give him de tip, see?"

"What young lady?" demanded the deputy.

M'Goulighan grinned knowingly. "W'y, de judge's daughter. I seen her w'en she come up here drivin' dem bays, an' I says to meself, says I, 'Cully, dat's yer Mascot.' Den I seen her in de court, an' she says, says she, 'Dere's a poor felly what's down on his luck, an' I'll jes' give de guv'nor a tip.' An' she done it."

Lawton had suspected as much all along, but he was not best pleased that M'Goulighan should have been shrewd enough to guess at the truth. So he said: —

"The less said about that young lady the better, Mac. Now go and wash up, and we'll take a ride on the cars."

M'Goulighan started for his cell, and then came back shuffling his feet and with his head hanging. "Say, Cap'n, dere's anudder t'ing; nobody else ain't never goin' to git no show to tell her, 'cause youse's gone an' called de turn; but I'd spout one o' me front teeth to have her know some day, see?"

"Know what?" said Lawton.

"Know dat I was on; dat I went to hell t'inkin' about what she'd done, see?"

"I'll tell her," said Lawton, as the easiest way to bury the matter; and M'Goulighan went to prepare for the journey.

In the outer corridor, Lawton gave the convict his final instructions. The motive behind the words was a curious commingling of the better and worse sides of the deputy's character.

"I'm going to parole you, Mac," he said curtly, "at least, so far as the irons are concerned. You'll walk to the depot two steps ahead of me, and I'm going to take it for granted you won't make a break. But you must walk straight, and keep your hands in your pockets. If you try to run for it, you'll get a bullet in the back. Do you understand?"

"I'm on," said M'Goulighan quietly; "but say, Cap'n, youse might send de kid; dere ain't no funny business left in me."

They left the jail as Lawton had prefigured, the convict ahead, with his eyes on the sidewalk and his hands in his coat pockets; the deputy two paces to the rear, keeping step with M'Goulighan, watchful, alert, suspicious of everything, and of nothing so much as his own late analysis of M'Goulighan's character.

Three squares down the main street they went, their feet beat-

ing even time upon the planking, the prisoner with his head down, and Lawton with eyes that saw only the man in front.

At the third corner he gave the sharp order, "Left wheel!" and they turned into the avenue leading to the railway station. Half way to the first cross street, Lawton became dimly conscious of an approaching commotion, shouts, the purr of spinning wheels, the thunder of galloping horses in the roadway; half conscious only, for his soul was in his eyes, and his eyes were fixed upon the slouching figure of M'Goulighan. At the critical moment, when the din rushed down upon them, the deputy's resolution to let nothing divert him wavered for a single instant, and he looked aside and saw that which sent the blood from heart to brain and back again until he was sick with horror. The commotion was a runaway; the snorting horses were Judge Warburton's thoroughbreds, with the reins whipping the dust at their heels. And in the reeling buggy Kate sat, clinging to the bows of the canopy top, very rigid and silent, but with the fear of death marring the winsome beauty of her face.

All this Lawton saw as one sees things by the dazzling flare of a camera flash-light. His first impulse was to forget everything but the danger which menaced the woman he loved, but he was recalled sharply to a sense of his sworn duty when M'Goulighan sprang out into the roadway and made as if he would cross before the flying team, and so lose himself in the ruck of pursuers on the opposite sidewalk. Lawton was a good shot, and he drew his revolver quickly, meaning to stop the convict first and one of the horses afterward. He aimed at the man as he was darting under the heads of the horses, and the report rang sharp above the pounding of hoofs and the shouts of the pursuers. Up to the instant when his finger pressed the trigger, Lawton's nerve had not failed him; but when he would have fired again at one of the horses a great doubt seized him, and he flung the weapon away with an oath and dashed after the runaway, which presently came to a stand, with the near horse wallowing in the dust.

Kate was out of the buggy when he ran up, and pointed with shaking finger to the struggling horse. "M'Goulighan — the convict — he's under the horse!" she gasped, fighting back the creeping horror that threatened to choke her. "You killed him

while he was trying to save my life, and I — it was I who — O God, forgive me! I'm no better than his murderer!"

Lawton's eyes followed the girl's trembling finger. There, half under the withers of the floundering horse, lay M'Goulighan, his hands still clenching the reins at the bit, and the death rigor deepening the lines in his rugged face. Stabbed with a quick-piercing remorse, Lawton leaped to the aid of the dying man. Yet even in the pangs of a wound for which, already, he knew there was no healing, he gave to the shaken woman who knelt by his side a word of comfort.

"Don't blame yourself; I should have done it if you hadn't warned me." Then the bitterness of it stabbed him again, and he added: "It's a coward's prerogative to shoot first and think afterward."

There were willing hands to assist the deputy in lifting M'Goulighan from the pavement; but the man died before they could carry him to the curb. It was Lawton who saw the end coming and told them to put him down; and the judge's daughter knelt beside him and wiped the sweat from his forehead. He opened his eyes at that and recognized her.

"Tell — de Cap'n — I ain't kickin'," he gasped. "I — broke de p'role, an' he had ter — do it — see?" And whatsoever answered to the soul of M'Goulighan spent itself on the last word, and the convict was free.

The Man With the Iron Arm.

BY GEIK TURNER.

"RECKON you're a stranger in Texas," said the man with the goatee, leaning over the back of the car seat.

I was.

"Texas is a grand State, sir; magnificent, sir, in every po'tion. But if you really want to see the best there is, sir, you just want to step over into Alfafa County. There ain't no place in this broad land, sir, that can size up with old Alfafa County; not in grass, sir, nor in cattle, sir, nor in men, sir. It's downright remarkable what men we raise, sir. I just now come from the termination of the career of one of the most extraordinary men of modern times. Yes, sir, Napoleon Bonaparte wasn't in the same class with him, and George Washington, he was just a pupil in the infant Sunday-school department alongside of him. Probably you've heard of him — 'Wrath of God Charlie' we call him down our way — the champion hitter of the Western States and Mexico."

I had not.

"Well, now," said the man, "you ought to know about him."

I acknowledged it; I wanted to know very much. The man with the goatee was glad to tell me.

"A year ago last fall," said the man, "there showed up in Alfafa county seat a little undersized cuss, lookin' sort of seedy and down in his luck. Rather ordinary lookin' in the face, yet you wouldn't pick him out for a fool, exactly. The most singular thing about him was that he was the most lopsidedest man you ever see. The matter was his right arm. You'll never see an arm like that, sir, not if you live to fall to pieces; it looked as big round as a stove pipe.

"Bein' a stranger, of course we asked him up to drink, and pretty soon we got to feelin' mighty well acquainted. So 'twan't

long before somebody they asked him what his business might be.

"'Well, gents,' says he, 'I don't want to deceive you. I come up here specially for one purpose, and that is to do up the best man you've got in this here county.

"'I don't mean with a gun, gents,' says he, observing several feelin' around back; 'I mean just man to man fashion, without iron of any kind whatsoever.

"'Now I know, if you don't,' says he, 'that I'm the best article treading shoe leather in this here county, and I want to do the square thing by you, for you gents have entertained me handsome. Now you just trot out the best man in this here county,' says he, 'and I'll show you, the worst mangled individual you ever see. Only one thing I ask,' says he; 'I don't want nothin' second class. The best article you've got ain't none too good for me.'

"So, our native pride bein' up, we steps aside and picks out Jim, the Howler. Now Jim, he wan't really the best thing we had at a scrap, but he was good, and plenty too good for that liittle runt — leastwise so we thought.

"'Now you're sure that's your best?' said the stranger, lookin' him over in a highfalutin' manner, which naturally made Jim so mad we just had to hold him down till we got things fixed.

"'Well,' said the little feller, 'if that's your best, I've got only one thing more to ask you. I want you to put us in a big ring,' says he; 'when I fight right I've got to have a ring a hundred feet across, so's to do real good work. I can't abide to have people pushin' and crowdin' me when I'm fightin'. And also,' he says, 'I don't want any help neither dressin' nor undressin'; though I guess I won't have to undress much for this.'

"So we took 'em out and roped 'em off a ring, a hundred feet in diameter, and set 'em down in it. By the time we let Jim go he was so mad he was hollerin' like a pig-killin', and we couldn't hardly get him to shake hands and do it regular — because, as the stranger said, we oughtn't to have any fight at all, if we wan't goin' to have it regular, accordin' to Marquis of Queensbury rules, and not a darned clawin' match.

"But the stranger was just as calm as ever. He had the most peculiar way of fightin' you ever see. Jim, he began immedi-

ately jumpin' up and down, but the stranger, he stood right still in his tracks, as if he was bracin' up for somethin'; then he turned just opposite from most fighters and held out his right arm plumb straight, and squinted along it as if he was aimin' a gun. About this time Jim, he was gettin' ready to light in, when all of a sudden the stranger hit him, and he went right up into the air in a half circle, like a kid divin' from a spring board, and lit on the back of his neck. That blow made a most extraordinary report, sir; you could hear it for a hundred yards; yes, sir. When we picked poor Jim up we found the sides of his mouth wan't contiguous, sir; the blow had took him in the side of the jaw, and his countenance was shifted right round.

"Well, after that the new feller was considerable looked up to in Alfafa, specially when he said as we used him so white, he guessed if the boys wanted him he'd just stay as one of the regular institutions of the county. Seein' how he was in for doin' the right thing by us, we got to feelin' pretty hard because we'd palmed off Jim, the Howler, on him for our best man; so, to be right square, we told him. Well, that made him pretty mad.

"'I want to know,' says he, 'if you fellers down here in Alfafa County think it's the square thing or anyways decent when a stranger comes here and asks you for your very best thing to trot him out a second-class article. Now,' says he, 'if you really have got somethin' good, that can do somethin' besides holler and fall over when a strong wind blows, just run him out.'

"Now at that time there wan't no doubt at all that the best man in Alfafa was Maneatin' Murphy. But the trouble with Maneatin' was, you couldn't get him to fight regular; he'd got to chew and bite just so much every time he got mixed up in a fuss and got excited. So we told the stranger 'bout thet; but he said he didn't make no distinctions on bitin'. If Maneatin' got near enough to take a slice out of him, he was good and welcome to it; only did he wrestle? He couldn't abide to fight with a man that wrestled. We told him that he didn't wrestle — he kicked some, but he didn't wrestle. So he says, 'I don't mind a little kickin', more or less; just lead him out to the sacrifice.'

"Now, it didn't take very long to lead Maneatin' out, after we got the big ring fixed up. Murph', he was kind of disappointed

when he saw the stranger, because he said he had expected a little exercise, but this was more like participatin' in a cake walk with your girl. It didn't look like a fair shake for the stranger, that's right. Accordin' to appearances, he had 'bout as much show as a bull-pup runnin' up against a locomotive engine.

"So, Maneatin', he began to walk around outside of the stranger on the back edge of his heels, with his hat over his eyes, just to see where he was, as he hollered to somebody in the crowd. But when he fetched his second revolution, the little feller got ready for him, and all of a sudden Maneatin' just rose right up into the air and turned over two or three times and stopped sudden, and when we picked poor Maneatin' up, he never could chew nobody any more, because his chewin' apparatus was all splintered. For more'n a month he had to be fed out of a bottle.

"Well, now, it ain't necessary to state that after that the stranger, he was just growin' more popular every day. Everybody wanted to take up with him. He was kind and obligin', but he wan't familiar. The trouble seemed to be because everybody was so mighty curious about his arm. When we asked him he explained it straight enough.

"'Well, gents,' says he, 'you see it's this way. My parents, they was bustin' big people, both of 'em, and I got a good start myself; but along back when I was a small boy I stopped growin' to speak of. But somehow or other this here arm of mine began to increase most unnatural, and it's been growin' ever since. I suppose probably all my natural strength went into that arm. Anyhow, it's the best thing in its line that ever came into the Lone Star State, barrin' none. But,' says he, startin' up, 'I know it's a deformity as well as anybody, and that's just one thing I'm sensitive about. I don't show no man my arm, because I don't expose myself, no, sir; and that settles it.'

"That bein' natural, of course, we never bothered him, but there was a good many that was mighty curious about that arm, just the same, specially strangers, and it made him feel pretty mighty ugly. Only nobody ever saw that arm. He roomed by himself, and he was mighty particular who was round him, and by and by, seein' how dangerous he was, people mostly let him

alone. Only one or two who run against him in a crowd, they said his arm felt as hard as iron. So, finally, some folks took to callin' him The Man with the Iron Arm. But most everybody called him Charlie, the Wrath of God, specially when they'd seen him fight,— because no man couldn't stand up against him.

"Well, in a little while Charlie, he came around to us and says: 'Now, gents,' says he, 'bein' as I am top dog of this here county, and, moreover, now I'm a regular institution here, feelin' some natural pride in her welfare, it strikes me it might be the patriotic thing for you fellers to run me up against some of these images in the surroundin' counties, incidentally makin' a good thing for yourselves. Bein' modest, I wouldn't want to take the lead myself, but there's a real good thing in it for somebody, because there ain't nothin' around here that can stand up against me.'

"That suggestion was a mighty popular one, sir, and we took to it right off. It ain't necessary to state what we did with The Wrath, because mostly everybody knows it already. We got up a string of barbecues first with them fellers from the surroundin' counties, which we rounded up with a little contest between Charlie and whatever the other fellers had to show up; it was easy for us, particularly at first, because there wasn't nobody that wouldn't give us odds when they saw what a little insignificant runt they'd run against. Then the first time The Wrath hit out at them they went down as if they was shot out of a gun. I won't detain you, sir, to 'numerate the fellers he run up against that year, but there was a mighty crew of them, you bet. First, there was Locomotive Jim from out East — a big, overgrown feller that fought right out straight ahead like the piston rods of an engine when he got started. The Wrath, he just hit him in the pit of his stomach, and we worried our lives out for fear we couldn't pump air enough into him to set him a-goin' again. Locomotive Jim, as one of the fellers said, couldn't get up steam again for twenty minutes. Then there was Excited Smith, who come from up North a-ways; he was counted a pretty dangerous man, but he really got no show, because he had to get hit once to do real good work, and when The Wrath hit him he wan't in no condition to do so. Then there was Jelly-makin' Jones — he was called a pretty hard hitter where he come from; and Billy,

the Mule, from down in Speroza County, they said he could punch a hole in a two-inch plank any day, but The Wrath, he made his hole first in both of them, and that was all there was to it.

"Well, by and by The Wrath, he got so celebrated that we got arrangements for puttin' him up against men all over Texas. We just used to get up special trains and sail out into every town and hamlet in the State where they thought they had something worth while, and when we came away, we left them without circulatin' medium to any extent, because we carried it with us.

"Oh, them were great days for old Alfafa, stranger. Business, she just boomed, and the saloon-keepers, they were rollin' in wealth. Because everybody who didn't have money to burn, he wasn't half bright. All you had to do was pick it up off on them trips.

"Now naturally, stranger, The Wrath, he was just the most tended-to man in Texas. He was doin' well, too; because, as he said, givin' us a sure thing like that, 'twasn't only reasonable that everybody should split up the money with him, when they gathered it in, and it was a pretty low-lived coyote that wouldn't do it. But after all, sir, nobody could call himself real familiar with him. He just kept away from most people; he said, because he couldn't stand havin' them so cussed curious about his arm.

"You see, the more folks he licked, the more they talked about him and that arm of his; but it was a surprisin' fact that nobody ever seen it, because he didn't show it up, even when he was fightin'. Nobody ever shook him by the right hand, either. He said he couldn't use it between times, it pained him so dreadful.

"'You can see, gents,' says he, 'how I must strain it, hittin' as I do.' So everybody'd just shake with his left hand, and have a drink on him and let him alone. They didn't dare to fool with his arm much, because they knew how it might be fatal to. But some fellers that run up against him in a crowd, they said that his arm was soft, just like a pudding bag, and other fellers, as I said, they allowed it was hard as iron, and naturally there was considerable disputin' about it.

"Well, things went along like this for a number of months, gettin' more prosperous for The Wrath and old Alfafa. The more The Wrath he fought, the more chances he got, and it came

so he had a couple of engagements each week. Some of 'em were right lively ones. There was one time particular when the boys, they more than made money. There was a couple of Northern prize-fighters down hangin' round the Mexico line, waitin' to get together, they allowed, when the sheriff went to sleep, to see who was the champion of the universe. So some of our boys, they went down and questioned one of them whether he wouldn't like to come up and have a friendly whirl or two with a local man, and he said he would, providin' there was enough in it. So the boys said they thought they had a pretty good man who could stand up six rounds anyway against him, and if he didn't he wouldn't have no difficulty carryin' off all the money he wanted. Well, the Northern feller, he allowed he didn't want to rob nobody; he'd make that there three rounds, and he'd come right up. So they arranged to have the lay-out in the opera house stage, and now there wasn't no doubt at all about there bein' money up. They had one of the boxes stacked round with it and two deputy sheriffs watchin' it, with their guns out all the time.

"Well, now, there wan't a great deal to say about that fight. The Wrath, he had a dressin' room to himself, and he seemed kind of nervous. He kept comin' out for one thing, and askin' if somebody didn't have an oil can — and of course we hustled round and got him one; but everybody kept askin' then what the devil did he want with an oil can. But of course he didn't tell.

"Then they led 'em out on the stage. The Wrath, he was lookin' rather white and weazened up, and he kept fussin' with his right arm; but the Northern feller, he just walked round with a kind of uppish air, and leaned on one leg and then the other, as if he thought he was a wax figger in a show. And when they set 'em to goin', the feller, he just walked up and slapped The Wrath right bang in the face. And then he stepped back, and smiled, and began to walk round, and, after a bit, he began gallopin' round and hoppin' up and down like a jack-rabbit hitched to a string, slappin' The Wrath and tryin' to confuse him. There wasn't no doubt that feller was quicker than lightnin', only he took too much time. The Wrath, he kept perfectly still, takin' a squint along his arm, and then — bang; somethin' hit that Northern jumper in the bosom, and he turned over so quick that he forgot

to leave off smilin'. Well, now, those fellers with him, they was dissatisfied. They allowed it was only a chance lick anyhow; but they couldn't bring up their man to participate further, so we had to pay their carfare to get 'em out of town. And then we all went out and observed that occasion. And say, stranger, that was the greatest night old Alfafa ever experienced.

"That was about two months ago, and things kind of quieted down, stranger, till this last sad catastrophe, which I alluded to in the beginnin' of this discourse. Somethin' about a fortnight ago there come a note from up country here sayin' they had somethin' they was willin' to back up against our man providin' we'd give 'em odds enough. So that bein' just what we was layin' for, we made arrangements to come up here right off. The feller they had they named him Grasshopper Bill. They give him this name because he was so pretty mighty spry. They said they never saw anything up their way that could touch him. Well, when we saw him in the ring yesterday, we all just bust out laughin'. He was a little cuss, not so big as The Wrath. But somehow The Wrath, when he saw him, he began to look mighty nervous. Well, sir, when we set 'em down in the ring, the little feller, he began to do a most confusin' lot of prancin'round. The Wrath he kept still as usual, but somehow he couldn't get no aim. Just as soon as he got set for him, the little feller, he'd jump in back of his right arm and hit him in the back of his head. Well, that sort of thing got powerful monotonous after awhile, and The Wrath, he was gettin' sort of played, and we was wonderin' when he was goin' to let off his arm. Then, finally, he let it go and he hit an awful lick; but he didn't hit anything — no, sir, not a thing. And, stranger, that arm, it come right off.

"When we recovered from our wonder and amaze, sir, that Grasshopper Bill, he had The Wrath licked in more'n a thousand points. And when we come up, The Wrath, he was lyin' in the grass in a pitiable condition. Then we brought up his arm and looked it over, and sure enough, sir, it was an iron arm! Yes, sir, that feller's arm was cast iron. He had a sort of straight iron sleeve for his reg'lar arm, sir, with grooves on the outside of it, and over and above that sleeve, sir, he'd fixed up a strikin' arm, that run back and forth like a strikin' piston rod on a locomotive.

He allowed he worked it by compressed air, sir, which he carried in a kind of jar along side of his chest. It was the curiousest arrangement you ever see; yes, sir, it was great.

"Well, sir, when we found out how he'd been deceivin' us all the time, and earnin' other people's money for us in a most unrighteous way, which money, of course, we couldn't never refund, havin' already spent most of it, and moreover, feelin' kinder downish over just losin' most everything we owned, his chances, they looked mighty thin. Most of the fellers were for tyin' him up right there. But finally he come to and pleaded for himself.

"'Gents,' says he, 'of course you can do what you want to with me, and you'd be justified by any coroner's jury in the Lone Star State, but I want to stand up here and say, gents, that I wouldn't have done this here thing if it hadn't been for my havin' a little sister and a widowed mother to take care of — yes, sir, and them sufferin' for food. And, you see, bein' down in my luck and havin' this here invention of mine, which I knew was a winner, what could I do, gents, I ask you, what could I do?

"'Now, gents,' says he, pleadin' hard, 'I've been the makin' of Alfafa County this last year, you might say, and I've always been liberal and generous with you. Now,' says he, 'be sort of liberal with me. Just give me my arm and let me go. I won't trouble you no longer.' So we finally agreed to his suggestion, and the last thing we see of The Wrath, he was just walkin' out through the suburbs towards the North, carryin' his old arm with him.

"And now, stranger," said the man with the goatee, "we ain't goin' home in our special train. We're just a-gettin' home the best way we can — in smokers and cattle trains. And, O Lord, stranger, won't it be a sad day for old Alfafa when we get there!"